

Franklin Gazette

Volume 15, Number 1, Spring 2005

Friends of Franklin, Inc. P.O. Box 40048, Philadelphia, PA 19106

Visit: www.benfranklin2006.org

"Fear not death; for the sooner we die, the longer we shall be immortal" *Poor Richard*, June, 1740.

President's Message

By Ralph Gregory Elliot

For the past ten years or so, Americans have indulged in a love affair with the Founders of our country. One can understand the multifaceted accomplishments of Franklin and the advent of his tercentenary coming together to inspire writers and historians like Brands, Morgan, Wood, Srodes, Isaacson and Stacy Schiff, to name the most recent, to delve into different aspects of the great man's life. But how to explain Hamilton, Washington, Adams, Gouverneur Morris and now, I understand, a new work on John Jay? It is a tsunami of fascinating and invaluable history of one seminal period in our nation's life, and we must all be grateful for these efforts.

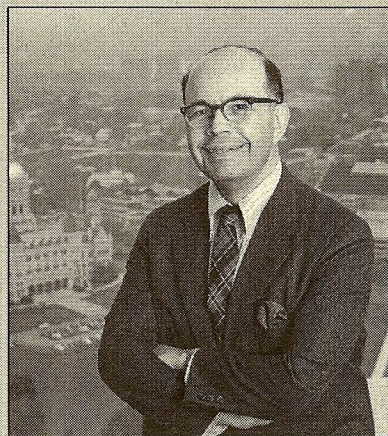
It is altogether fitting, therefore, that an institution like the Friends, regardless of its youth, honor its own Founders. And so we note with sorrow the passing on February 14 of one of our Founders, Deane Sherman, after a long illness. Deane, along with a few others like Stuart Karu, perceived the importance in 1988 of starting a continuing group to honor and perpetuate the memory and contributions of Benjamin Franklin; and her interest, devotion and fidelity to the Friends' success never waned or flagged. A woman of wit, grace and intelligence, she inspired us all and we shall deeply miss her.

How serendipitously appropriate it is, too, that her dear friend and co-Founder, Claude Lopez, will be specially honored on April 8 at a dinner in Washington culminating what promises to be a fascinating symposium on Franklin. Claude's meticulous scholarship, combined with a felicity of phrasing and fluid prose style, have exposed the world to the human side of Franklin, often overlooked by others concentrating on his considerable and varied accomplishments.

In this, its seventeenth year, the Friends is truly coming into its own. Our membership grows, our fisc is much improved, and we are sponsoring or co-sponsoring more Franklin-related trips, exhibits, and programs than ever before. We are increasingly being recognized as the "people to see" when one wants to know more about Franklin, and our web-site and Gazette have become invaluable aids in that process.

It has truly been a joy, an unalloyed pleasure, to have been a part of this endeavor and to thank every one of you for your continuing interest and contributions to the cause.

Editor's note: Sadly this is our last treasured column from Ralph Elliot who died on February 28. Devoted to the Friends to the end this missive was found on his dining room table, written after the teleconference Board Meeting on Thursday, February 24.



As President of the Friends of Franklin, from 1996-2005, Ralph Elliot provided the organization with fervent dedication, legal and financial expertise and an open-mindedness that moved us along in a very positive direction. Under Ralph's leader-

ship the membership grew, our fiscal house was put in order, and we delighted in reading and learning from his **President's Message** column that appeared in the *Gazette*.

Ralph, now you and Ben can spend as much time as you wish discussing whatever topics you fancy, from First Amendment issues, to the theater and fine dining. We'll miss you and continue on the path you paved for us.

Roy E. Goodman
Acting President

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Gift memberships and
back issues are available.

Thank You, Ralph

By Claude-Anne Lopez

"An erudite constitutional lawyer."
"The master of precision." "One of
the most articulate defenders of the
public's right to know." "A mentor to
generations of freedom of information
lawyers." "Connecticut's authoritative
voice on constitutional speech and
press issues." "An intensely passion-
ate man." "He was smart, so smart."
"His mind worked so quickly."

And:

"If there were 10 more Ralph Elliots,
there would be a thousand fewer
lawyer jokes."

So much from Ralph's colleagues in
the practice of law.

For us he was, since 1996, the
wonderful president of the Friends of
Franklin, whose very first act was to
put our legal status as a non-profit
association in good order.

Opening the *Gazette* and finding his
presidential "Messages" has been a

constant delight. Whatever interesting
book he read, whatever thought came
to his mind, Ralph found an exciting
way to relate it not only to Franklin,
but to current events. Past and pres-
ent illuminated each other in a perfect-
ly agile, comprehensible way, and no
one found oneself thinking: "But of
course." The daunting problems of
nation-building in Afghanistan and Iraq
already existed, be it in a milder way,
in the opposing views of Jefferson and
Hamilton, the tug of war between
states' rights and the central govern-
ment, between a pastoral state and
an industrial one. Today's encroach-
ments against freedom of inquiry and
expression would have exasperated
Franklin for whom freedom of speech
was a given.

We'll miss you, Ralph. We'll miss
your occasional sharpness of tongue,
your humor, your marvelous lawyerly
brain.

Editor's Note:

*The following extract of a letter from Jonathan Powers
regarding the last letter in the **Gazette** echoes sentiments
that were dear to Ralph Elliot's heart.*

I must say that I warmed very strong-
ly to Ralph Gregory Elliot's defense of
and declaration for the core values of
an enlightened society. I hope you will
forgive another quotation from
Erasmus Darwin, but in his posthu-
mous "Temple of Nature" (1803) (retit-
led from "The Origin of Society" in
order to deflect hostility from certain
quarters) he has the following
sequence of verses, written in a differ-
ent context but with certain echoes
which seem to me very apposite
today:

*Rouse the dull ear, the hoodwink'd
eye unbind,
And give to energy the public mind;
While rival realms with blood unsated
wage
Wide-wasting war with fell demoniac
rage;
In every clime while army army meets,
And oceans groan beneath contend-
ing fleets;
Oh save, oh save, in this eventful
hour
The tree of knowledge from the axe
of power;
With fostering peace the suffering
nations bless,
And guard the freedom of the
immortal Press !*

(Canto IV. Lines 277 to 286)

Jonathan Powers





In His Own Words:

A New Child Born Among the Immortals

In early 1756 Benjamin Franklin wrote a letter of condolence to his niece Elizabeth Hubbard on the occasion of his brother John's death. As the Friends of Franklin grieve the loss of Ralph Elliot, we hope that Franklin's words bring some comfort. Let's follow Franklin's suggestion: "As our number grows less, let us love one another proportionably more."

"Dear Child,

"I condole with you, we have lost a most dear and valuable relation, but it is the will of God and Nature that these mortal bodies be laid aside, when the soul is to enter into real life; 'tis rather an embrio state, a preparation for living; a man is not completely born until he be dead: Why then should we grieve that a new child is born among the immortals? A new member added to their happy society? We are spirits. That bodies should be lent us, while they can afford us pleasure,

assist us in acquiring knowledge, or doing good to our fellow creatures, is a kind and benevolent act of God—when they become unfit for these purposes and afford us pain instead of pleas-

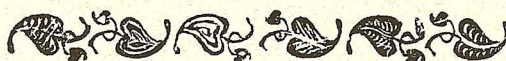


Docteur Franklin Couronné par la Liberté, 1778. Aquatint engraving by J.C.R. de Saint Non, after a drawing by J.H. Fragonard. Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

ure—instead of an aid, become an incumbrance and answer none of the intentions for which they were given, it is equally kind and benevolent that a way is provided by which we may get rid of them. Death is that way. We

ourselves prudently choose a partial death. In some cases a mangled painful limb, which cannot be restored, we willingly cut off. He who plucks out a tooth, parts with it freely since the pain goes with it, and he that quits the whole body, parts at once with all pains and possibilities of pains and diseases it was liable to, or capable of making him suffer.

"Our friend and we are invited abroad on a party of pleasure—that is to last for ever. His chair was first ready and he is gone before us. We could not all conveniently start together, and why should you and I be grieved at this, since we are soon to follow, and we know where to find him. Adieu. B.F."



Notes On Reading Franklin

By Martin Mangold



If the pleasure of reading Franklin is the privilege of allowing his thoughts to run through our minds, we can be grateful for the multitude of thoughts he has left for us, expressed with perfect skill, clarity, insight and wit, fresh from his pen and readily available. Some thoughts of his, however, are concealed in his writings and can be easily overlooked. I have what for me is a fresh example.

In October of 1779 Franklin was in France with his two grandsons: Sally's son Benny (Benjamin Franklin Bache, age 10, off to school in Geneva) and Temple (William Temple Franklin), the nineteen-year old son of William. Franklin had worked on a plan whereby Temple would accompany the Marquis de Lafayette on an invasion of Britain by forces from France and Spain. The plan had recently fallen apart, and Franklin was writing to Lafayette to extend his regrets.¹

To more fully understand this little note, we need some additional background.

These two grandsons shared an uncle, Francis Folger Franklin, born on October 20, 1732, who died one month after his fourth birthday. Carved into

the child's tombstone, rather than an elaborate sermon like Benjamin would write for the stone of his parents in Boston, was the simple tribute "The DELIGHT of all that knew him."²

Decades later, in a letter to his sister written from London in January 1772, in one of his marvelously broad single sentences, Franklin connected this son Francis with this grandson Benny, who was then two years old:

"All who have seen my Grandson agree with you in their Accounts of his being an uncommonly fine Boy, which brings often afresh to my Mind the Idea of my Son Franky, tho' now dead 36 Years, whom I have seldom since seen equal'd in every thing, and whom to this Day I cannot think of without a Sigh."³

Seven years later, now in France, Franklin brought "the Idea of Franky" to mind again, in the most subtle way. He wrote to Lafayette that he regretted the collapse of their invasion scheme as a lost opportunity for Temple:

"Your kindness to my Grandson in offering to take him under your Wing in the

Expedition is exceedingly obliging to me. It would have been of infinite advantage to him to have been present with you so early in Life at Transactions of such vast Importance to great Nations. I flattered myself too, that he might possibly catch from you Some Tincture of those engaging Manners that make you so much the Delight of all that know you."⁴

Franklin had not run out of ways to compliment his friends. With the words "the delight of all that know you," the idea of Franky was certainly called to the man's mind. Perhaps he saw Lafayette as the man Franky might have become. Perhaps it had occurred to him that the current month contained Franky's 47th birthday, and Lafayette at 22 was a reasonable age to have been the child of a grown-up Francis.⁵

In any case, by putting on paper so exactly the words long since carved in stone, Franklin revealed to himself, if no one else, that he admired Lafayette so deeply as to consider him to be made of the same good stuff as Francis. We can find in that letter to Lafayette a gift from Franklin that is private and sweet -- a sigh for Francis.

Notes:

1 Claude-Anne Lopez & Eugenia Herbert, *The Private Franklin*, (1975), p. 243.

2 *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, II: 154n. That stone appears in drawings and photos of the Franklin family gravesite into the 20th century. Around 1950, when the City of Philadelphia and Christ Church stabilized the highly visited site with additional brickwork, the original stone disappeared. The replacement marker does not include the epitaph. Franklin's parents died in 1744 and 1752: *PBF*, VII: 230.

3 *PBF*, XIX: 29. B.F. Bache was born 8/12/1769: *PBF*, I: lxiii.

4 *PBF*, XXX: 423. Lopez & Herbert on p. 333, date this letter 10/15/1779, even closer to Francis' birthday.

5 Lopez & Herbert, op. cit.; Lafayette was born 9/6/1757 --<http://www.marquisdelafayette.net/>.

My thanks to Deane Sherman, Leslie Watson and Neil Ronk for their assistance.

American Explorer Meets American Icon

by James Zug

In the eighteenth century, the classic American Dream story was the one Benjamin Franklin told.

It was October 1733. Franklin, a seventeen year-old from Boston spent his first night in Philadelphia at an old inn on Water Street called the Crooked Billet. He had arrived that morning, fallen asleep at a Quaker meeting service and spent almost the last of his money on three breadrolls, two of which he gave away. That afternoon he took a room at the Crooked Billet. "Here I got a Dinner," Franklin later recalled in his autobiography. "And while I was eating it, several sly Questions were ask'd me, as it seem'd to be suspected from my youth & Appearance, that I might be some Runaway."

The Crooked Billet in Philadelphia sparked more than one historically significant fire. (There are at least a dozen Crooked Billet pubs in Great Britain today, many of which are centuries old. A billet means everything from accommodation to a ticket to ballot paper to a note—the old billet-doux—but a crooked billet refers to a twisted stick of firewood.)

Another New Englander seeking his fortune in Philadelphia, John Ledyard reenacted Franklin's famous start sixty years later. Ledyard was a Connecticut-born explorer who had bailed out of Dartmouth after a year, made the first recorded descent of the Connecticut River and joined Captain James Cook's third and final voyage. With Cook, Ledyard sailed around the world on one of the epic adventures of the age. He crossed the Equator four times, hiked in Cape Town, swam in Tahiti, and kayaked in the Aleutians. Along the way, he became the first American citizen to see the west coast of North America, as well as the future states of Alaska and Hawaii.

In May 1783 Ledyard came to Philadelphia to promote a fur-trading scheme on the Northwest Coast. He hoped to collect otter skins in present-

day British Columbia and sell them in China. After taking a room at the Crooked Billet and eating breakfast, Ledyard went out for an exploratory walk around the docks. It was a dispiriting sight. After eight years of war including two years under British occupation, Philadelphia was exhausted and the economy was at a standstill. There were no ships and no merchants ready to take on Ledyard's bold plan. Ledyard returned to the Crooked Billet. In the quiet of his room he emptied his pockets and discovered he was almost as penniless as Franklin had been. But like Franklin, Ledyard did not hold tightly to his last coins. He went out and bought a new pair of shoes. Within days his fortunes had changed. He borrowed money from his uncle to pay his Crooked Billet bill, and he walked his way into the offices of Robert Morris, the richest man in America, and persuaded Morris to create a partnership and enact Ledyard's scheme.

Two years later John Ledyard had dinner with Benjamin Franklin in Paris. The partnership with Morris had resulted in theft, despair and a complete abandonment of the fur-trading scheme, and Ledyard had sailed to Europe to find more scrupulous backers. In May 1785 he landed in Paris. He befriended Thomas Jefferson and formed a new fur-trading company with John Paul Jones. At some point before early July 1785, Ledyard journeyed out to Passy to dine with Franklin. They surely talked about the Crooked Billet, but also about Franklin's health problems and his children, as the following letter of Ledyard's written in the summer of 1785, revealed:

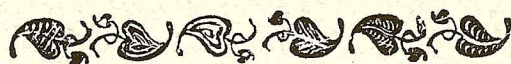
"I think it will be difficult for any subsequent Plenipotentiary to have as much personal influence in France as Doct'r Franklin. It will at least be so until the cause that created that venerable patriot shall become less recent in the minds of these people, & in truth a very few years are sufficient to effect that in this country & distinguished

virtue & distinguished vice are equally disagreeable after a certain period of duration. Though under constant pain from the Gravel in the Bladder and bent down with age, that excellent old man exhibited all the Symptoms of good cheer, of health, the gay philosopher and friendly countryman. I am now reading Some of his miscellaneous writings and my bosom glows with admiration and pride but alas Franklin thou art cursed with blockheads for thy offspring as the roman Cicero—they are indeed illegimates."

Ever the postmaster, Franklin carried Ledyard's letters back to America, forwarding them to his cousin Isaac Ledyard in New York. Their paths never crossed again. Franklin reigned as America's elder statesman, while Ledyard soon gave up on fur trading and tried to walk around the world. In 1788 Catherine the Great arrested him in far eastern Siberia after he had covered more than a third of the globe. He then set off for the interior of Africa, in search of the source of the Niger River. Ledyard died in Cairo in January 1789. It was over a year before American newspapers ran obituaries on the country's first great explorer.

Franklin never mentioned Ledyard in his writings, but one can imagine that he read of Ledyard's death just a few weeks before his own in the spring of 1790. One can see him folding the newspaper and staring out the sun-flecked window and remembering the eccentric Connecticut traveler and then thinking, again, of his own first day in Philadelphia, a young man lodging at the Crooked Billet, poor in cash but rich in great dreams.

James Zug is the author of *American Traveler: The Life and Adventures of John Ledyard, the Man who Dreamed of Walking the World*, which has just been published by Basic Books in New York. You can learn more at www.jameszug.com.



News from the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary

The Tercentenary Relocates – and Redesigns

The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary greeted the beginning of a new year with several exciting developments. Most noticeably, we have moved our offices to a new location on Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia. Our new address is 135 S. 18th Street, Suite 702, Philadelphia, PA 19103. This move coincided with our need to build up our logo into a more easily trade-marked design. The result is the work of Bart Marable of Terra Incognita, the firm that has produced our new web design. We were particularly taken by the frame's visual echo of Franklin's famous "Join or Die" political cartoon – let us know what you think.

Terra Incognita has, meanwhile, completed Phase 1 of our site, <http://www.benfranklin300.org>. Its design was inspired by Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and incorporates Poor Richard's aphorisms with printer's ornaments and a period color scheme. At the moment, you can use the website to check the Tercentenary's exhibition schedule, search for upcoming events, read about our consortium and board, and link to our institutional partners. Work on Phase 2 – which will include uploading the Frankliniana database as well as an interactive almanac of exhibition highlights – has already begun.

The Benjamin Franklin Memorial Coin Act Is Passed

It is also our great pleasure to announce that both houses of Congress have passed the Benjamin Franklin Memorial Coin Act. The Act was signed into law – as Public Law 108-464 – by President George W. Bush on December 21, 2004. Coin bills require two-thirds co-sponsorship, which is not easily achieved. A tremendous expression of appreciation and thanks is thus due to all who helped achieve that target: Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr. and his staff, particularly Catherine Graham, Legislative Assistant; Congressman Castle and his staff, particularly Emily Pfeiffer; Senator Specter and his staff, particularly Tom Dower; Senator Santorum and his staff, particularly Zack Moore and Ashley Horning; Governor Rendell's office; Peter Grollman of IKON; and numerous others, including many Friends of Franklin, who called their Senators on our behalf.

Public Law 108-464 authorizes the production of limited edition coins minted to commemorate Benjamin Franklin. The US Mint is planning to produce 500,000 silver dollars, half of which will feature a young Franklin, and the other half an older Franklin. The Tercentenary will be closely involved with the coin's design and pro-

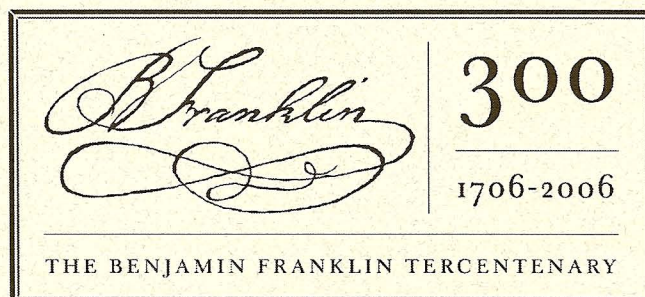
duction. This bill ensures that the 300th anniversary of Franklin's birth is appropriately marked, as described in the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary Commission's enabling legislation.

Ben Franklin 300 Philadelphia

Ben Franklin 300 Philadelphia is the name we've chosen to encompass the year-long commemoration of Benjamin Franklin's 300th birthday in the Philadelphia region. The celebration will run from fall 2005 through 2006, and will focus on the Tercentenary's exhibition, *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World*, at the National Constitution Center. However, it will also include an exciting array of complementary exhibitions, lectures, symposia, concerts and special events, in conjunction with offers at many of the region's historical and cultural organizations, restaurants and hotels. More details on which institutions are joining in the celebrations, as well as descriptions of their various programs, can be found at www.benfranklin300.org, on our searchable calendar.

Exhibition Catalogue Nears Completion

The lavish companion book for *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World* (Yale University Press) is now approaching completion. The complete contents of the book, including edited essays and final art, have entered the advanced copyediting stage. The book will include over 250 color illustrations, many of them published here for the first time, and a series of original essays by today's preeminent Franklin scholars, written to be highly accessible. Initial scholarly reviews of the book have been very positive. Because of the extraordinarily generous grant we've received from The John Templeton Foundation, a copy of this book will be sent to every public library system in the United States – a fitting tribute to the man who founded our nation's first public library. This book's rare combination of scholarly content with broad distribution will guarantee that insightful interpretations of Franklin's life, message, and historical impact will now be readily accessible around the country for generations to come.



FRANKLIN TIDBITS

Benjamin Franklin, Climatologist?

Professor Karen Harpp of Colgate University credits Franklin with being the first man to make the connection between volcanic eruptions and global climate. In 1784 he was in Paris, where he observed that the summer of 1783 was abnormally cold both in Europe and in the United States. This was followed by an early and severe winter accompanied by "a constant fog". He suggested that the change may have arisen from the eruption of a volcano in Iceland. Read B. McDonnell's article in the January issue of *Scientific American*.

Benjamin Franklin Award for Creator of Ensembl:

The annual award is presented by Bioinformatics.Org to "an individual who has promoted free and open access to the materials and methods used in the scientific field of bioinformatics." The organization's founders are of the opinion that Franklin, in freely and openly sharing his ideas and refusing to patent his inventions, embodied the best traits of a scientist. The 2005 award went to Ewan Birney of the European Bioinformatics Institute. Birney has been a "significant force in Open Source in Bioinformatics and science", as well as advocating free access to genome information. The project of which he is a co-leader, Ensembl, has made genome annotation available to all on the worldwide web, and the Ensembl project has been open-source software from its inception, allowing researchers and corporations alike to reuse and extend the software system. The award will be presented at the organization's annual meeting, held in conjunction with the Bio-IT World Conference and Expo in Boston, from May 17 through 19.

Franklin Likeness Exceeds its Estimate:

At a sale held by Sotheby's on Jan. 27 one of the famous "fur collar" portraits of Franklin, painted by Joseph Siffred Duplessis while the "Representative American" was in France during the American Revolution, sold for \$576,000. To see a reproduction of the image, tap into Sotheby's website, and go to Auction Results under the date. The painting was part of the "Art of the Enlightenment" sale, lot 54. <http://search.sothebys.com/>

In the Spirit of Poor Richard:

A new almanac and planner has been published by Eric Utne designed to "awaken your

connection to nature wherever you live and to celebrate every day of the year." Entitled "Cosmo Doogood's Urban Almanac: Celebrating Nature and Her Rhythms in the City," the day planner combines a potpourri of features, including a month-by-month field guide to flora and fauna where you live, poems, weather predictions, recipes, and other interesting information.

Franklin, Massachusetts:

The *Milford Daily News* of Jan. 18 published a story on the celebration of Franklin's birthday. A wreath was placed next to a newly erected statue of Franklin. The statue is located outside the town's public library, an institution founded by Franklin.

Benjamin Franklin Integrity Project Gets Results:

Friend John Walburn's persistence has paid off. In an attempt to encourage newspapers doing business in or serving counties and cities named in honor of Franklin, the organization has been since last fall circulating monthly news stories about the Founder. Kevin Horrigan of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* was the recipient of one of these news releases. He admitted in a Jan. 22 editorial that Franklin's birthday had caught the paper unaware. This was stunning because Franklin "is a great favorite of those of us in the printing trades." This moment of embarrassment catapulted the reporter into his own investigation, and his conclusion was that "what [Franklin] did, what he discovered in the 18th century makes possible much of what we take for granted in the 21st." He continued in this vein, "This commentary, for instance, is being typed in a house protected by lightning rods...by a man wearing bifocals...in a font called Franklin Gothic on a laptop computer powered by electricity from a storage battery.... He provided the first explanation of positive and negative charges of electricity. A computer chip contains billions of positive-negative, on-off pathways that enable it to think. For that matter, although Franklin didn't invent newspaper commentary he did a lot to popularize it..." The story goes on to muse at length about Franklin and his legacy. Send that man a membership application!

Franklin & Marshall College's Year-Long Party:

A unique celebration of the 300th year of Franklin's birth will begin this fall at the school he helped to found in Lancaster, PA, in 1787. Besides focusing on studies of Franklin and

his times, the Writer's House and Center for the Liberal Arts and Society will offer grants to students creating projects related to Franklin. F&M students who tutor school-age children will share Franklin's history with their students and invite them to events on campus. These events will include a presentation of one of Franklin's printing presses, an opera opening, a dance performance, nationally known speakers, and the premiere of a new play about Franklin by Tim Slover, F&M's artist-in-residence in spring 2006.

Voting for the Greatest American:

America Online and the Discovery Channel are sponsoring a contest to nominate the greatest American. The nomination period is Jan. 13 through Feb. 1. The voting will be limited to internet users. The top 100 vote-getters are scheduled to be announced in March. In May the Discovery Channel will kick off its series, "Greatest Americans," profiling the 100 nominees. Viewers can then vote for their favorites, and the popularly-elected winner will be announced some time in June.

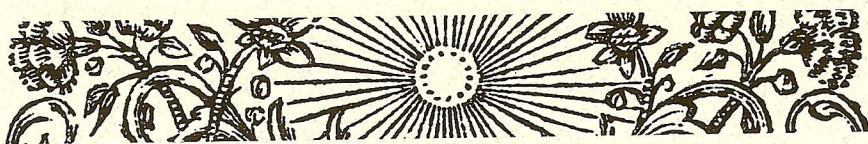
Franklin Renovations Pennsylvania:

Senators Rick Santorum and Arlen Specter announced on Oct. 12, 2004, the passage of a Senate bill that authorizes up to \$10 million in federal funding for the repair and rehabilitation of the Benjamin Franklin National Memorial at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, and the development of the Tercentenary exhibit, "Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World."

London:

Benjamin Franklin House announced its plans to open Franklin's only surviving home to the public as a museum and educational facility in time for Franklin's 300th birthday in January, 2006. In 2004 the British Heritage Lottery Fund awarded the project £1 million. Fundraising continues to complete the project and create a £1 million endowment fund to further the aims of the project and secure the house's future. For more information tap into: <http://www.thersa.org/franklin/>.

"Benjamin Franklin and the American People" is the focus of this year's 2-week Independence Institute offered to teachers, K-12, by Independence National Historical Park. Anyone interested should contact: George Boudreau, 717-948-6204 or gwb11@psu.edu



Remembering Deane Sherman

by Claude-Anne Lopez

With the death of Deane Murray Sherman, on February 14, the Friends of Franklin lost a warm and devoted member. John and Deane Sherman were among the first to opt for a life membership in our group and Deane hardly ever missed a meeting, from our initial reunion in Philadelphia to her days as Vice-President. To all our conferences and trips on our hero's trail, she brought a smiling, lively presence, a gentle touch of humor, and more than a touch of elegance thanks to her very chic hats.

We met in New Haven in 1949, when her Betsy was three and my Michael two and a half, all of us living in a low-budget community of graduate students and junior professors. Betsy and Michael spent happy hours playing house in the cardboard box in which the Sherman refrigerator had arrived, and Michael soon learned the ways of the dutiful American husband.

Deane fascinated us Europeans (my Italian husband, my Belgian self), with her tales of growing up in Western North Dakota (Beulah was the place), with its snowbound, homeschooled winters, and her life in jeans and on horseback.

She invited me to join the "Yale Dames," a group of which she was president. Yale dames? Stately old ladies? No, the sprightly wives of graduate students, a welcome relief from the all-male atmosphere of the University.

When the Shermans moved to Washington where John started his brilliant career at the National



Institutes of Health, Deane discovered her true calling: to help other people reach their full potential. Given Betsy's singing talent, and Mary Ann's performance on the harp, Deane became involved in promoting the careers of young musicians all over the world, never forgetting her base in Montgomery County, Maryland, where she became President of the Arts Council. She also pushed, with zest, the study of French at an early age, which led her to testify in Congress and be honored by the *Palmes Académiques* in Paris. The great joy of her last years came from the musical talent of her two grandsons, Michael and Edward.

In the sixties, Franklin brought Deane and me even closer. When I started giving talks and writing, she was by my side, helping me choose my outfit, calming me down over a cup of tea, and sending coded signals at the right time. The sister of one's dreams.

Goodbye, dear friend. The seeds you have sown far and wide will keep blossoming in the sun for a long time to come.

Good Reads

Len Fisher, *Weighing the Soul: Scientific Discovery from the Brilliant to the Bizarre* (New York, 2004) contains a chapter entitled "The Course of Lightning through a Corset," which describes some of Franklin's investigations into electricity.

Walter Stahr, *John Jay: Founding Father* (Hambledon & London, March, 2005). The first new biography in 60 years of the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who also served as President of the Continental Congress, Governor of New York and fellow Peace Commissioner with Franklin.

Stanley Weintraub, *Iron Tears: America's Battle for Freedom, Britain's Quagmire: 1775-1783* (Free Press, January, 2005). A new account of the fight for American independence through British eyes by a professor in the history department at Pennsylvania State University.

James Zug, *American Traveler: The Life and Adventures of James Ledyard, the Man Who Dreamed of Walking the World* (Basic Books, March, 2005). Jefferson called Ledyard a "man of genius", and the dust jacket describes Ledyard as "a Ben Franklin with wanderlust."

The Last Voyage of Captain Cook: Including the Siberian Journals and Selected Letters of John Ledyard, edited by James Zug (National Geographic, March, 2005). This volume of Ledyard's writings includes his letter describing his meeting with Franklin.

Stacy Schiff, *A Great Improvisation: Franklin, France, and the Birth of America* (Henry Holt, April, 2005). Edmund S. Morgan, former chair of the administrative board of The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, and emeritus professor of History at Yale

(continued on next page)

University says of the book, "Stacy Schiff's extensive scholarship, her eye for the colorful detail, and her lively wit combine to bring alive—in full dress and in an absorbing narrative—the cast of statesmen, adventurers, spies, courtiers, patriots and con men who have a part in the story of Benjamin Franklin's negotiations for American independence, and to fix among them America's greatest diplomat, winning his way (and America's) in a style of calculated disarray. An extraordinary book."

Forthcoming

Jonathan Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years War* (University of Nebraska Press, May, 2005). A new book about Franklin's world by a Senior Associate Editor of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*. N.A.M. Rodger says it is "a magnificent book, another tour de force in combined diplomatic, political, and naval history."

Jim Lehrer, *The Franklin Affair: A Novel* (Random House, April, 2005). According to Franklin biographer Walter Isaacson, the news anchor's latest novel "captures some fascinating controversies about Franklin's life and provides a deft satire of the world of academic writers."

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

On-going – July 29, 2005.

"Joseph Priestley, Radical Thinker." Exhibit at the Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia, PA. The exhibit mounted to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Priestley's death, brings together artifacts and images including some items originally owned by Priestley which interpret his life and work. Perhaps best known for his scientific work including the identification and isolation of oxygen, Priestley was also a well-known minister and helped to found the First Unitarian Society of Philadelphia.

Ongoing- February 2006.

Exhibit at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. "Only One Man Died: Medical Adventures on the Lewis and Clark Trail." Exhibit explores the medical aspects of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Meriwether Lewis carefully planned the trip consulting with doctors in Philadelphia to learn critical medical skills he would need for the expedition and purchasing medical supplies, scientific equipment and provisions.

March 25-September 25, 2005.

Franklin serves as host of the United States Pavilion at the World Exposition in Japan.

April 10, 2005.

Franklin Fanfare: An Afternoon with Dr. Franklin, 2:00 – 5:00 p.m at the Philadelphia Antiques Show, including a lecture by Jay Robert Stiefel "Benjamin Franklin & the Philadelphia Artisan," comments by Jay Snider on his collection, and an overview of the Tercentenary celebration by Dr. Rosalind Remer. The show will be held at the Armory, 33rd Street and Lancaster Avenue. Check www.philaantiques.com for more information.

April 14, 2004.

"Artisans of Franklin's Philadelphia," lecture by Jay Robert Stiefel, for the Washington Decorative Arts Forum, at the Metropolitan Club, Washing, D.C. Contact Forbes Maner fmaner@bmmsdc.com for more details.

June 8, 2005.

Jim Lehrer, host of PBS "News Hour" will discuss his new book, *The Franklin Affair* with Gordon Wood, author of *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. New York Historical Society, 6:30 p.m. Admission is \$10 and reservations are recommended. Call 212.817.8215 or e-mail continuinged@gc.cuny.edu for reservations.

October 19, 2005.

Symposium sponsored by Benjamin Franklin House: "Benjamin Franklin, Design and Innovation," 4:00-9:00 p.m. (including a buffet dinner) at the Royal Society of Arts, London. Contact BenjaminFranklinHouse@msn.com for reservations.

December 15, 2005.

The special tercentenary exhibit, "Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World," will open in Philadelphia on December 15, 2005. The exhibit will travel to Boston, New York, Paris, Denver and Atlanta before closing on January 20, 2008.

January 17, 2006.

Celebration! of Benjamin Franklin, Founder. Procession to Franklin's grave and luncheon in honor of Franklin's 300th birthday, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Contact Carol Smith, 856.429.8331 or cwsmith@verizon.net for more information.

Gala Opening Celebration of Benjamin Franklin House, London, to be held at The Banqueting Hall, Whitehall, London. Contact BenjaminFranklinHouse@msn.com for reservations.

Stealing God's Thunder:

Benjamin Franklin's Lightning Rod and the Invention of America

Published by Random House, August 2005

by Philip Dray

Contrary to popular belief, Benjamin Franklin was not just a statesman who dabbled in science; in his own lifetime he was known for the most part as a man of science, or "natural philosopher." And he became famous initially in the early 1750's because of his scientific experiments with electricity, chiefly his proof that lightning was a natural phenomenon. Franklin accomplished much during his long life, but to his contemporaries he was always "the man who tamed the lightning."

I began to think of writing this book shortly after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. Without really knowing why at first, I began re-reading the famous Carl Van Doren biography of Franklin, which had been written in the 1930s. Just as Franklin's benign and courageous character must have been a balm to Depression-era readers, I found him a comforting companion during the tense fall of 2001. Franklin, after all, lived through the most tumultuous and dangerous era in American history, and always managed to keep his cool. One of the most distressing things about the aftermath to 9-11, I thought, in addition to the pervasive sense of panic and fear, was the talk of nascent religious fundamentalism, or even a "religious war" between Islam and Christianity. I began to wonder if the story of Franklin's lightning rod -- his bringing of enlightenment to a subject long shrouded in fear and superstition -- might speak to the present day.

One of the powerful forces that Franklin and many other Enlightenment thinkers worked to vanquish was "Providence," the notion that illness, earthquakes and other natural disasters, and lightning bolts, were a sign of God's will and could not be resisted or questioned. Franklin, armed with his lightning rod, attacked this idea directly. He was confident the creator God's greatest gift to mankind was Reason, and that an innovation to protect mankind from lightning did not defy God or the church, but instead was a product of the insight and initiative God had bestowed on man. Franklin often asked: if God did not resent people putting a roof over their heads to stay out of the rain and cold, why should He begrudge their saving themselves from lightning.

Like most people, I once thought of Franklin as an ingenious tinkerer. I was astonished

to learn how deeply respected he was as a man of science during the 18th century, to the extent that he was often compared to Newton or Galileo. This seemed even more remarkable considering that Franklin only attended school through the second grade, and was otherwise self-educated.

His greatest scientific accomplishment was making electricity into a mature science. It is hard for us to imagine a time -- before the 1750's -- when electricity was considered nothing more than a parlor trick involving sparks produced by friction. Franklin was able to explain how electricity functioned and gave it its first vocabulary with such terms as "positive," "negative," "battery," and "electrician." He also showed in his famous kite experiment of 1752 that thunder and lightning were natural electrical phenomena.

Lightning is one of nature's most capricious and deadly forces and -- before Franklin -- it was the source of intense fear and superstition. Most people believed it was the work of witches or the devil, or a form of divine retribution. The lightning rod, which rendered lightning harmless, was thus both a major scientific and cultural breakthrough. Lightning was (and is) still dangerous, but people began to think of it differently once they understood it was a natural, not supernatural, event. Ironically, for dispelling superstitions about lightning, Franklin came to be viewed by some as a kind of wizard or sorcerer.

As *Stealing God's Thunder* relates, while Franklin's electrical discoveries brought him much acclaim, there were many powerful doubters, including the clergy, who were troubled by Franklin's "presumption" in denying God his favorite weapon of resentment. In fact, for as long as anyone could remember, all the way back to Greek, Roman, and Norse mythology, one of the gods' chief privileges had been the ability to hurl thunderbolts earthward to punish the misdeeds of mortals.

Thus, both the lightning rod and its inventor became potent symbols of the Enlightenment. By "controlling" lightning, so long associated with God's wrath, the rod cast doubt on divine authority as well as the absolute influence of monarchs, an effect greatly enhanced when Franklin himself became a leading actor in the American Revolution. In France, where Franklin

served from 1776 to 1785 as the American ambassador, and where he was enormously popular with the public, it was said he "snatched lightning from the sky and the scepter from tyrants."

Startling proofs of man's ingenuity -- such as the lightning rod and manned balloon flight, which first appeared in Paris in the 1780s -- were welcomed as liberating influences; and the virtues of empiricism, self-criticism, and experimentation which had made them possible suggested to the intellectuals of the late 18th century that human society itself might be transformed by scientific rationality. All manner of scientific thought and achievement -- from Franklin's lightning rod to Isaac Newton's gravity to William Harvey's theories on the human circulatory system -- inspired Franklin, Madison, Washington, and the other founders of the United States of America, as they designed a government based on "natural laws" of human equality and the empirical notion that such truths were "self-evident."

Franklin often wondered if electricity had any useful application. He, of course, did not live to see the introduction of the electrical circuit or the use of electricity as a source of power. No doubt he would be astonished and pleased to know how thoroughly electricity has illuminated and enhanced human life, (although with his great pragmatism he might be concerned at how completely dependent we have become on it). He most likely would be dismayed to learn that in the America he did so much to help create, at the dawn of the 21st century, a debate rages about whether to teach superstition or science to children, and leadership decisions are frequently based on faith, not science.

Franklin's humble lightning rod, then, is an important part of American history. It's a reminder of not only the bountiful rewards of human curiosity, but also of the value of scientific courage in a democratic society.

*Philip Dray is the author of **At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America** (Random House 2002), which was a Pulitzer Prize Finalist and won the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Book Award and the Southern Book Critics Circle Award for Non-fiction. He lives in New York City.*

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